



Dana E. Blackwell
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LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS, CHAIR

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **January 5, 2004**, in room 140 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Carol O. Biondi
Brenda Galloway
Phalen G. Hurewitz
Helen Kleinberg
Daisy Ma
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Sandra Rudnick
Dr. Harriette Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused)

Patricia Curry
Joyce Fahey
Lily Griego
Christina S. Mattingly
Adelina Sorkin
Rev. G. Lind Taylor

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the January 5, 2004 meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes for the November 17, 2003 and December 1, 2003 general meetings were unanimously approved. The minutes for the December 1, 2003 chair's meeting were unanimously approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair Williams welcomed Commissioners and audience members and wished each a Happy New Year.

NEW BUSINESS

Workgroup Report – Permanency: Commissioner Hurewitz, Co-Chair, explained that the permanency workgroup (workgroup) created an AB 408 sub-group to explore the legislation's impact on developing a permanency plan for youth 14 years and older under the Department's supervision. Beverly Muench, DCFS, provided a brief overview of AB 408.

Ms. Muench, Deputy Director explained that the major goal of the bill is to ensure that no child leaves the foster care system without a lifetime relationship/commitment with a caring adult when adoption or legal guardianship is not possible. Additionally, the bill requires that the Department make reasonable efforts to maintain relationships with individuals important to the child/youth age 10 years of age, older, and live in a group home. These individuals would be invited to participate in planning efforts, such as the transitional independent plan. The legislation also puts forward the right of each child, age 10 years and older, to attend any juvenile court hearing. If the child is not present, the court shall determine whether proper notice was provided to the child and inquire into the child's absence. Additionally, the state is required to modify its mandated training curriculum to include the importance of such relationships and how such individuals can be identified. Finally, the bill provides the opportunity for every dependent child to participate in age appropriate, extra-curricular enrichment and social activities with the approval of their caregiver using a "prudent parent standard".

Lisa Mandel, Children's Law Center (CLC), indicated that the CLC was a co-sponsor of the bill and acknowledged the CLC's Executive Director and Special Projects Director for their efforts in bringing AB 408 to fruition. Ms. Mandel emphasized the importance of establishing life long committed relationships for emancipated youth, despite the resources available to them through the emancipation division. Ms. Mandel added that the legislation also includes a provision for caregivers to apply the "prudent parent standard" which is an important aspect to the quality of life for dependent youth. This quality of life standard has been instituted in the Welfare and Institutions Code and many groups are working to ensure its implementation. With respect to the permanency aspect of the legislation, the social worker is legally required to inquire about potential relationships of significance for dependent youth age 10 years and older. It is Ms. Mandel's hope that the Department will also afford this opportunity to youth under the age of ten as well. Finally, the court is obligated to ensure that these efforts toward permanence are contained in all court reports and to make the appropriate orders that would ensure that these relationships are being supported and fostered by the social worker.

Stacy Savelle, CAO, expressed the importance of involving youth in identify important people in their lives and the commitment needed on behalf of the social workers to look for and foster those relationships. Social workers will need training to understand the importance of providing youth with a supportive and committed relationship. If there is no significant adult in the child's life, social workers will need to look for mentors and others to develop relationships that could potentially become significant and life-long.

Commissioner Hurewitz inquired as to how the Department is planning to implement the requirements of the legislation. Ms. Mandel stated that there are many groups working on the implementation of the quality of life provisions. With respect to the permanency aspect, Ms. Savelle responded that there are some mentorship programs in place as well as the resources, including staff support, provided by the emancipation program. She agreed with Commissioner Hurewitz that to meet the permanency goals of the legislation, a volunteer program would be beneficial despite the high financial cost it would take to implement. Commissioner Hurewitz suggested that the Department's future budgets incorporate the funding to do so as well as exploring opportunities to secure funding through grants and foundations. Ms. Mandel stated that the sub-group will focus on such a program. Paul Freedlund, Deputy Director, indicated that Dr. Sanders is committed to establishing a formalized function within the Department to identify significant others in the early stages of the case plan.

Vice Chair Biondi asked how this might impact adoption efforts for older children. Ms. Mandel indicated her belief that the search for significant others in a child's life early in the case plan will lead to a higher rate of legal permanence for youth. Ms. Savelle added that the success of these efforts should also lead to a higher rate of placement stability. Commissioner Biondi asked how the mentors will be informed about their potential obligation to the youth. Ms. Savelle shared that the sub-group will need to explore this issue, but believes that it will be similar to current mentor training practices that will need augmentation to meet the goal of establishing a life long relationship for youth.

Vice Chair Rudnick inquired as to definition of the "prudent parent" standard. Ms. Mandel stated that the intent is to allow the caregiver the ability to act as a parent and afford youth the opportunity to participate in similar activities as their non- dependent counterparts. Ms. Savelle added that all caregivers (foster families, group homes) and CSWs would need training in this area. Additionally, Ms. Savelle stated that some group homes have begun to establish mentorship programs for youth and when the youth exits the group home the mentor remains with the youth and not with the group home as a volunteer. Ms. Savelle commented that the Emancipation Partnership has a mentorship group that is examining established mentor programs that will perform this development process.

Commissioner McClaney suggested that the subgroup look to partner with the faith based community and emphasized the importance of the recruitment process of the mentors as well as the matching process with the youth.

Commissioner Kleinberg expressed concern about the potential of a youth identifying someone with whom they have a significant connection and the Department believing that the relationship is not in the child's best interest.

Finally, Commissioner Hurewitz inquired about a potential connection to and utilization of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) to identify those significant people in a child's life. Ms. Mandel indicated that there is some offshoot of FGDM that she believes could be very successful if the youth is afforded the opportunity to identify important people in their lives. Commissioner Hurewitz also suggested that recruitment of caregivers should include information about mentoring.

Commissioner Hurewitz thanked each of the presenters for their time and contributions.

Title IV-E Waiver – Application Development: Dr. Sanders acknowledged and thanked Andrew Bridge for the role he has played in the development of the Title IV-E Waiver (Waiver) application, as well as the efforts of Mitch Mason, DCFS. Dr. Sanders explained that the necessity of the Waiver is based on the three outcome areas that he has determined to be critical to the Department's success: 1) shorter timelines to permanency, 2) reduced reliance on out of home care and 3) improved safety. If the first two outcomes are achieved the Department would receive a reduction in federal dollars. He indicated that concern has been expressed about the potential risk for the Department to step away from IV-E entitlement and how that would impact the Department's ability to provide service to children and families. Dr. Sanders indicated that the Department is currently losing federal revenue and will continue to lose federal revenue because of structural changes in Title IV-E. He explained that the Waiver application would include negotiation with the federal government to allow the Department to gain revenue from year to year. As the availability of prevention dollars from the federal government is limited, Dr. Sanders expressed the need for funding to be used more effectively at the front end of the system to ensure a reduction in out of home placement.

Dr. Sanders stated that although the perception in the Department and likely in the broader community is that out of home placement is uncontrollable, he believes that out of home placement can be controlled through initial placement and the length of time children are in care through the development of community resources to support families. He stated that the attainment of the desired outcomes is reliant upon a dramatic system change, of which funding is central.

Dr. Sanders expressed the need for the Commission's support of the Waiver. He briefly reviewed some of the Waiver goals. These goals included supporting families at the front-end of the system to reduce entries into out of home care by 15%; an increase in the number of children adopted; expediting family reunification timelines; decreasing the number of children existing the system through emancipation; reduction in the need for high-level group home settings and finally a reduction in the rate of abuse while in care.

With respect to evaluation, Dr. Sanders indicated that the Department would negotiate with the federal government an evaluation structure that will include pre and post

measures. He stated that the Federal government would like to have an evaluation that has a control group similar to the one that is in place with the Wraparound program. Instead, the Department believes that it is most important to measure its performance from a historical context. Additionally, the Department will potentially also choose a comparison of SPAs to like jurisdictions in the state to determine success and satisfy federal evaluation conditions. Both Delaware and North Carolina have designed pre/post evaluations that have satisfied the federal government.

Finally, Dr. Sanders discussed the “cost neutrality” aspect of the Waiver. The Department would propose that the Waiver include an annual growth of 4.2% over the existing budgetary baseline of \$1.4 billion. The receipt of funds would be monthly as opposed to receiving it funds each time a child is determined to be IV-E eligible. The Department will also request the ability to build in a 5% increase in the first two years of the Waiver to put in additional services to see a reduction in out of home care in the last three years of the Waiver. The Waiver will also include an “opt out” condition in the event that the Waiver is for some reason unsuccessful. Dr. Sanders indicated that the Waiver application will be submitted in January 2004 and hopes to start in October 2004.

Commissioner Hurewitz inquired about the preparation of legislation as indicated in the timeline process. Mr. Mason indicated that there will be the potential for “enabling legislation” to address some federal regulations, which will be included in the negotiations with the state and federal government to ensure that the Department has the regulatory authority to exercise the Waiver.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked if the evaluation will include annual benchmarks that the Department will be required to meet and whether the federal government has the authority to “opt out” of the Waiver if the Department does not meet the benchmarks. Andrew Bridge stated that he is unaware of the federal government ever having opted out of a Waiver based on the evaluation, but it has the authority to do so. Mr. Mason stated that the benchmarks are not set on an annual basis; rather the benchmarks are set on averages over the five-year period of the Waiver. Additionally, results should not be expected until years four and five as the Waiver seeks to allow the Department spending flexibility to front-load the system with needed programs and services. Mr. Bridge added that there are no restrictions to how the funds are spent; however, the Department and the state are subject to the conditions of the Program Improvement Plan.

Chair Williams thanked the Department for the presentation and expressed the Commission’s appreciation to Joan Smith, DCFS, who has led the workgroup efforts on the development of the Waiver application.

OLD BUSINESS

Education Coordinating Council – Approval of Letter to Board of Supervisors:
Commissioner Kleinberg reminded the Commission that the development of an Education Coordinating Council (ECC) was a recommendation derived from the Education Summit. Chair Williams asked that Commissioner Kleinberg be added to the

letter as a signatory in recognition of all of her efforts in this area. The letter was unanimously approved with the above suggested amendment.

Currently, discussion is focused on funding and staffing issues for the ECC. Miriam Krinsky, Children's Law Center, added that this initiative would be going before the Board of Supervisors on January 27, 2004. Presentations have also been made to the County Office of Education, Los Angeles City Council and Los Angeles Unified School District to garner further support for the ECCs development. Efforts are also being made to bring the State Department of Education on board with this initiative.

PUBLIC COMMENT

As there was no request for public comment, Chair Williams urged the workgroup members to be mindful of the timelines delineated in the Safe, Stable and Nurturing Families recommendations when setting workgroup meetings. Commissioner Kleinberg agreed to provide a Family Reunification presentation to the Commission on February 9th. Chair Williams then opened the floor for discussion items from audience members and/or Commissioners.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked how caseloads would be distributed during the Department's redeployment of staff. Paul Freedlund, DCFS, indicated that the plan is to have a disbursement of cases without disrupting the flow of cases. In addition, SPA realignment would allow for cases to be assigned within the community where the placement is located. Commissioner Kleinberg expressed concern about how CSWs would determine which cases to transfer and how redeployed staff will be re-trained before they are on the line. Mr. Freedlund stated that existing case transfer policy will be utilized and Regional Administrators will oversee the "judicious" transfer of cases. CSWs will have the benefit of training and shadowing during the redeployment phase. The training will be similar to that which was employed with MacLaren Children Center (MCC) staff. Commissioner Kleinberg questioned whether the Department examined the training provided to redeployed MCC staff to determine whether it was successful. She felt this was important, as they are choosing to replicate it during this current redeployment phase. Mr. Freedlund indicated that there was no formal debriefing of MCC staff, and stated he would investigate.

Chair Williams inquired about the caseload standards for both the state and the Department. Mike Jefferies, SEIU, stated that a generic caseload yardstick in the Department is 31. This is double the "best practice" standard. The goal of the redeployment is to lower the caseloads to 26.

MEETING ADJOURNED